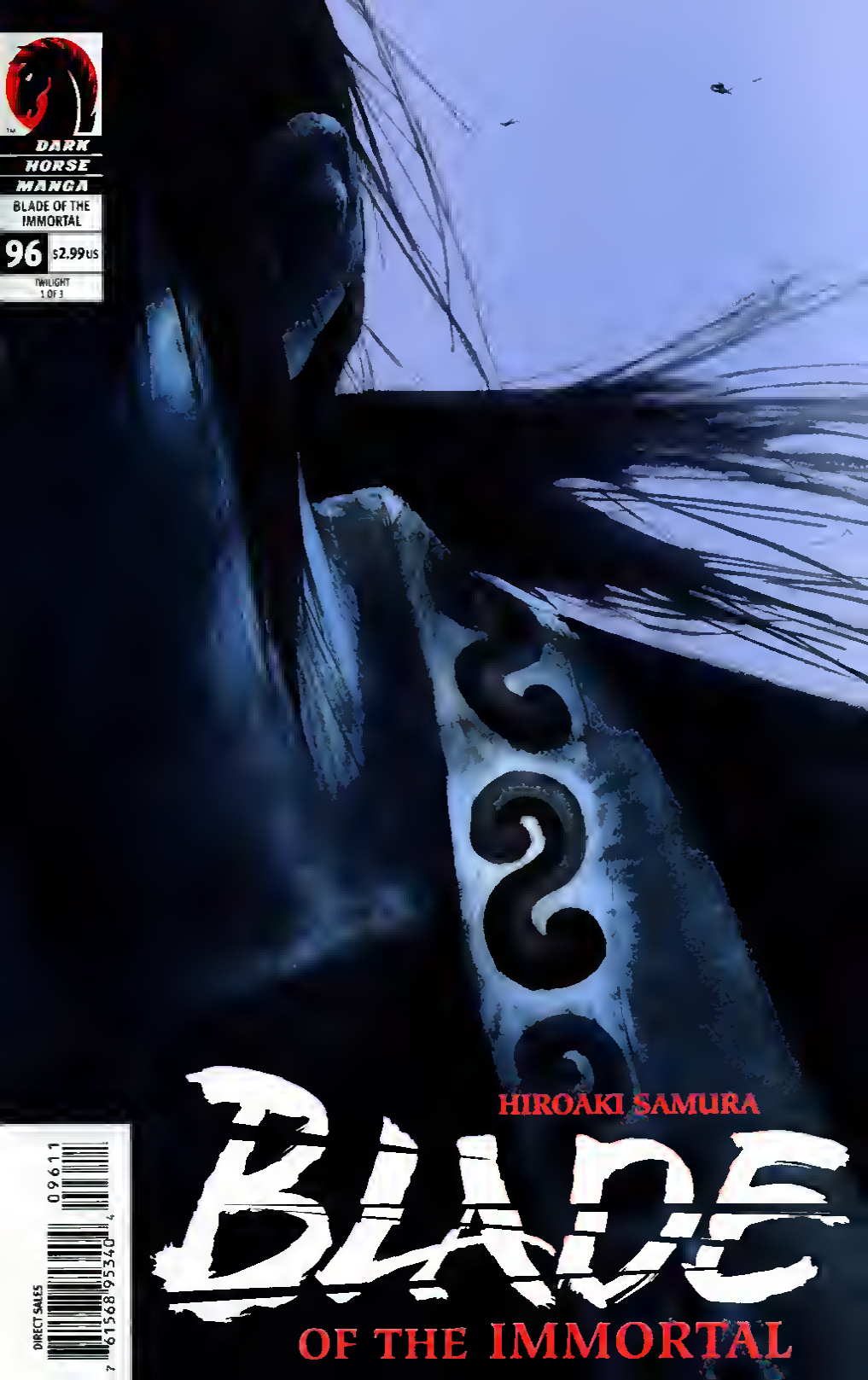
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by

DANA LEWIS

lettering and retouch by

TOMOKO SAITO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin* vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN

Last heir of the Mutenichi *ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū* seeks Anotsu's death

ANOTSU

The leader of the Ittō-*ryū* sword school

MAGATSU

Formidable Iitō-*ryū* swordsman

GIICHI

Mugai-*ryū* head collector

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

After a devious, crippling ambush by the Mugai-*ryū*, the future of the Ittō-*ryū* is uncertain. Rin and Manji recover from previous ordeals, with Rin intent on honing her skills after making a new vow to Anotsu: "I'll wait and see how far you go! Maybe the Ittō-*ryū* wins! Maybe it is destroyed! But when I know for sure... I'll come to kill you!!"

designer DEBRA SAILEY editor PHILIP SIMON publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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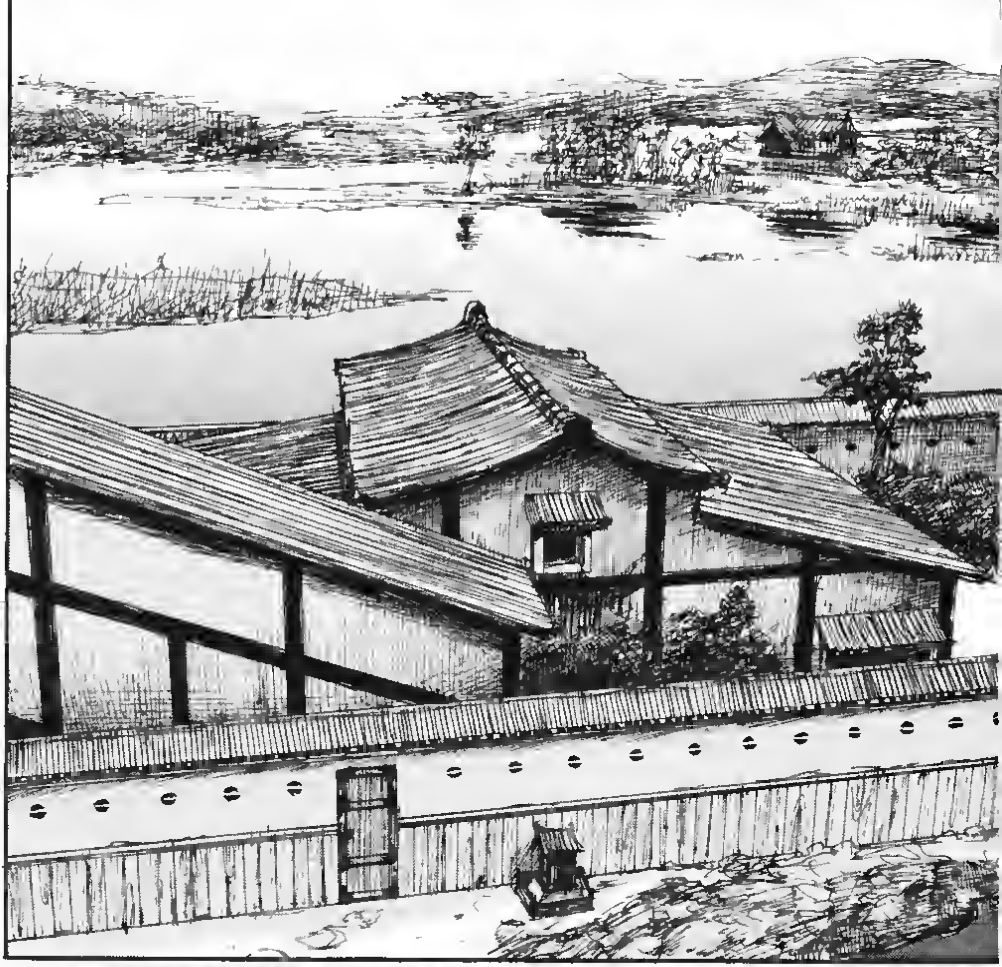
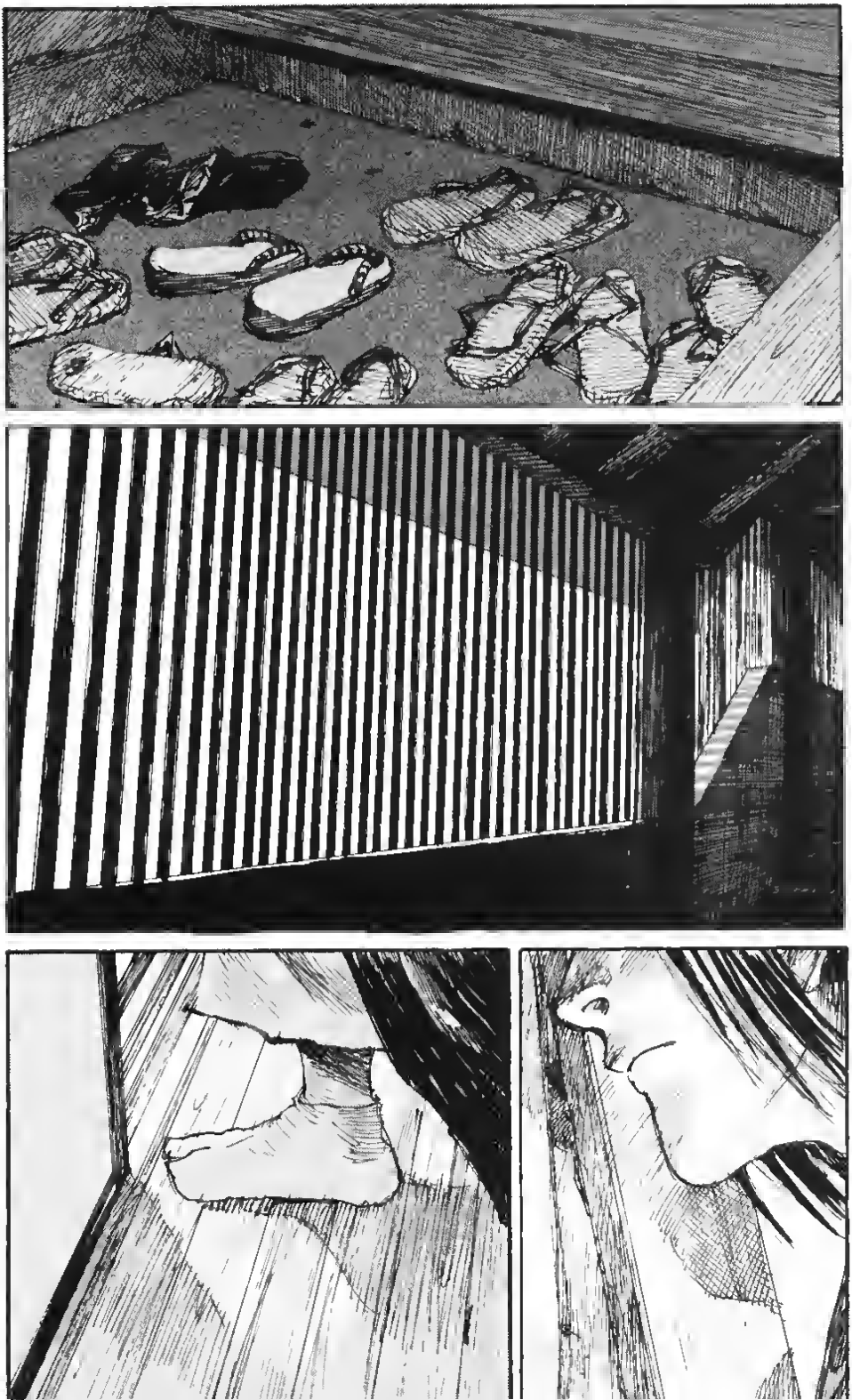
無限の住人

TWILIGHT

-part one-



ITTŌ-RYŪ



BY NOW, YOU ALL KNOW. WE LOST TEN FRIENDS A MONTH AGO.
A SET UP AT A BANQUET.

A PLOT BY HABAKI KAGIMURA, BAN-GASHIRA.
THE MAN WE CALLED "AKAGI"... REVEALED.

IT'S UNBEAR-ABLE...
...TO LOSE SO MANY SO QUICKLY.
YET IT'S EVEN GRAVER...

...THAT OF THE TEN, NINE WERE LEADERS OF "OUR" DŌJŌ...
...FROM MUSASHI EDO TO KAI AND SAGAMI!
PUTTIN' IT DIFF'RENT...
...WE GOT A BAD ASS ENEMY?
HE'S GONE AN' FLIPPED NINE DŌJŌ?
EXACT-LY.

ALL DUE TO MY POOR JUDGE-MENT!
FORGIVE ME. I WAS... FULL OF MYSELF.
ALL WAS GOING SO WELL... I BECAME OVER-CONFIDENT.
NO POINT REHASH-ING IT. NOT NOW...
THE REAL QUESTION IS, CAN WE RIDE OUT THIS WHIRLWIND WITH JUST OUR CORE ITTŌ-RYŪ?
THE TEN OF US RIGHT HERE?
WHADDYA SAY?

ISN'T...
...ISN'T TEN ENOUGH...?
YEAH, SO THEY GOT TEN OF US AT A FEAST.
THEY GOTTA FIGHT DIRTY JUST TO BEAT US!
TŌSHU,* ALLOW ME TO BE FRANK.
FOR TWO YEARS, WE SCRAM-BLED.
CON-SOLIDATED DŌJŌ AND SWORD SCHOOLS.
WE DID IT TO PROVE OUR STRENGTH AND WILL.
NOT TO BE BURDENED WITH KENSHI.
*LEADER.

REGRETTABLY, WHERE WE SAW *PATRIOTISM*, THEY SAW *REBELLION*. WE SHOULD HAVE *EXPECTED* DECEIT!
NOW WE MUST STAND *FIRM*! *MAKE* OR *BREAK*!
ITTŌ-RYŪ HAS NOTHING TO *TEACH*.
IF ANYONE POUNDS ON OUR DOOR...
...IT'S FROM *LUST*. FOR *POWER*.
THAT'S WHAT *I* THINK.
ANYONE WHO QUITS, *KNOWING* THAT...
...WAS *NEVER* ONE OF US, *TŌSHU*.

UH... I DON'T GOT BIG WORDS, BUT...
WHEN WE CAME TO EDO...?
THEY KILL OUR FRIENDS...
...WE GOTTA DO SOMETHIN'... I THINK.
THE NICE GUY WHO PUT US UP...? HE'S DEAD.
...KAGE-HISA?

THIS IS OUR LAST STAND!
WE'RE DOGS! PROUD OF OUR FANGS! WE ONCE WISHED TO SERVE OUR MASTER!
BUT IF OUR MASTER HAD GONE SOFT AND DECA-DENT...?
ALL THE MORE REASON TO KEEP OUR FANGS SHARP!
IF OUR MASTER'S A FOOL WHO WOULD PULL OUR TEETH... NO MORE!
WE WILL DEFEND OUR PRIDE, WITH ALL OUR SOULS!

THOUGH WE REND OUR MASTER LIMB FROM LIMB!

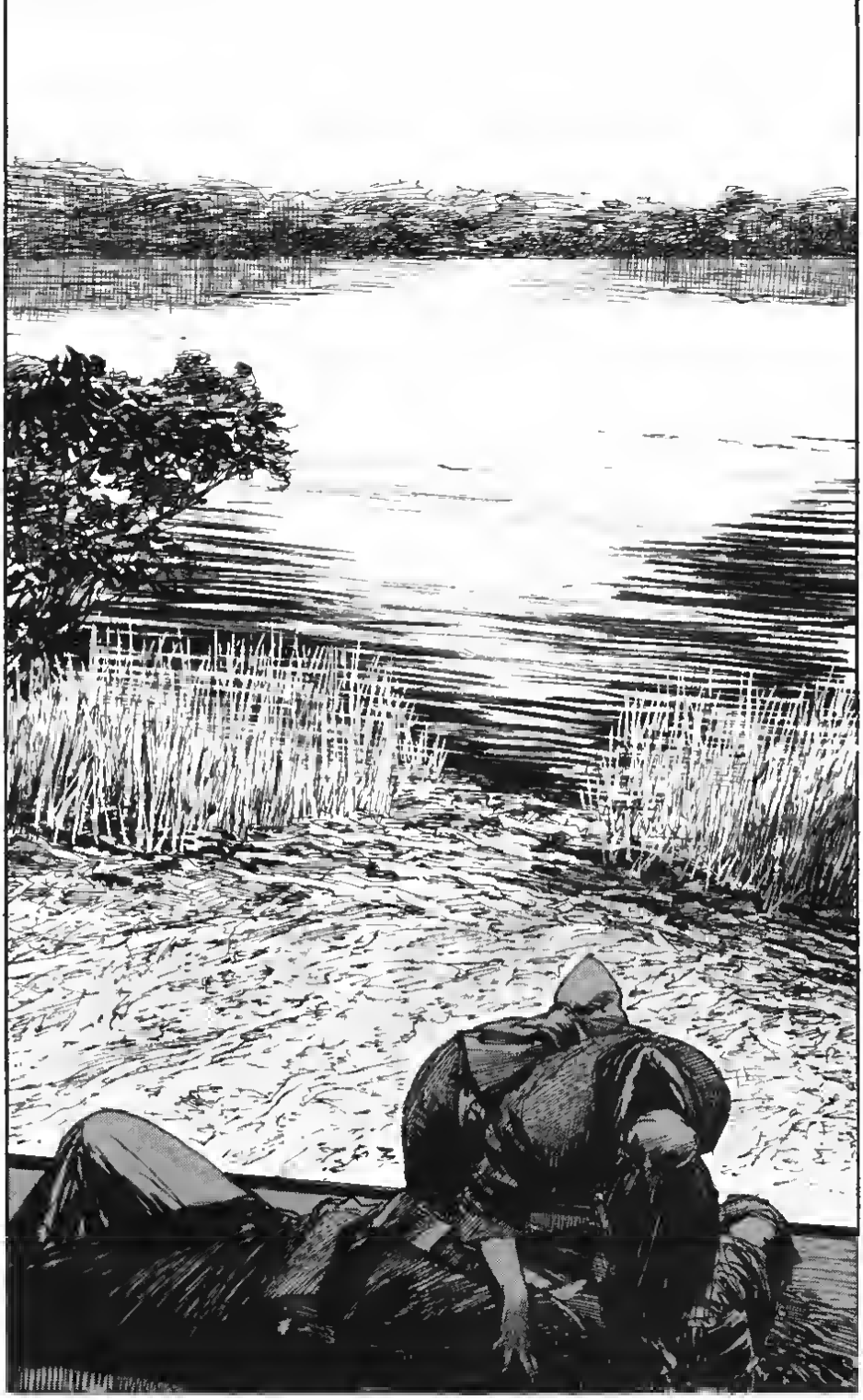
SHK

AWESOME!
SIX! I COULD BARELY DO FOUR BEFORE.
I DIDN'T GO TO KAGA FOR TRAINING...
BUT...
IT'S LIKE...
MY EYES... MY LEGS... SO NATURAL NOW.
OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT

MANJI?
MANJI!
SNRRG
UNNG
NOT...
HUNGRY...
FUMP
HE'S
SOAK-
ING...!

... AHH!
I WANNA CUDDLE... !
DAMN, DAMN, DAMN!
THOK
THOK
BUT... I CAN'T.
I CAN'T GO BACK THERE.
I'LL HAVE TO LEAVE THIS MAN BEHIND...
'CUZ... SOME-DAY...

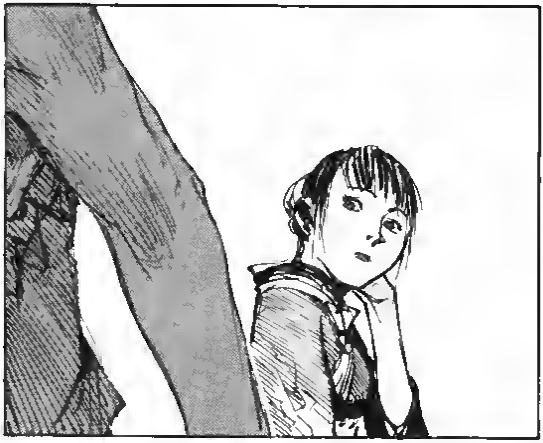
...AND I MADE IT BACK.
...MANJI? I MET ANOTSU. ALL ALONE...
GIVE ME MY... REWARD...



NAME...
NAME...

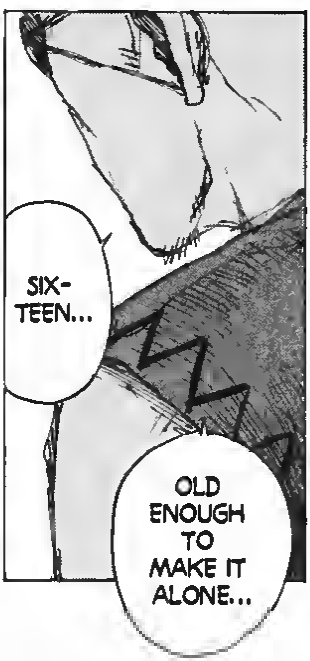
MANJI'S IN THE HUT?

EH, UHM... YES!
OH RIGHT...! GIICHI!



RIN... WASN'T IT?
HUH? UHM, YES?

HOW OLD ARE YOU?
UH, UH... SIXTEEN.


SIX-TEEN...
OLD ENOUGH TO MAKE IT ALONE...

WHAT... ON EARTH?
AW, CRAP. HOW'D YOU FIND ME?
YOU ASK SHIRA?

WHAT'S WRONG?
...NOTHING.
WHAT I TELL YOU NOW... IS FROM HABAKI KAGIMURA, BAN-GASHIRA.
A BAKUFU ORDER.

EFFECTIVE TODAY, YOU JOIN THE MUGAI-RYŪ.
FINAL-LY...
HEH HEH...
YOUR RAP SHEET...
... IS EXTREME, EVEN FOR MUGAI-RYŪ.

FOUR YEARS AGO, YOU *MURDERED* HATAMOTO HORII SHIGENOBU.
...FOR TWO YEARS, THEY *LET* YOU SWIM. *NO* PURSUIT.
PLUS, MORE THAN *ONE HUNDRED* POLICE AND DEPUTIES. YET...
YES. THEY LET YOU SWIM. BECAUSE OF A *CO-INCIDENCE* OF INTERESTS...
...ITTŌ-RYŪ.
NOW THE TIME HAS COME...
...TO ADVANCE OUR PAWNS.

"THE OTHER DAY, WE PRUNED BACK *THEIR* RANKS."
"WE'VE ALSO HAD OUR *OWN LOSSES*."
"WE NEED *BODIES*, AND THERE'S NO TIME FOR TRAINING *AMATEURS*."
IF THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ* IS ALLOWED TO REBUILD, IT'LL BE *TOO LATE*.
WE NEED THE *POWER* TO TAKE THEM. *NOW*.
AND YOU WANT *ME*?
HEY, BIG *HONOR*.
IT'S NOT ABOUT *HONOR*.
IF *ITTŌ-RYŪ*'S A *POISON*...

YOU AND I... ARE ALSO POISONS. IN THEIR EYES...
...KILLING EACH OTHER WORKS BEST OF ALL.
IF I SAY FUCK OFF?
I ADVISE YOU. THAT'S NOT AN OPTION.
REFUSE...
...AND THIS MAN TAKES YOUR LIFE.

HOH...!
NOW THAT SOUNDS FUN!

TO BE CONTINUED...!

HORSEPOWER

APOCALYPSE NERD

I was asked by my Dark Horse editor, David Land, to write a guest column mainly as a cheesy way (is there a NON cheesy way?) to promote my own upcoming mini-series for DH (entitled *Apocalypse Nerd*, due out in early '05), though he also said I was free to prattle on about anything else—"like the election, for example." Seeing how I have nothing else to prattle on about, I've decided to prattle on about the election!

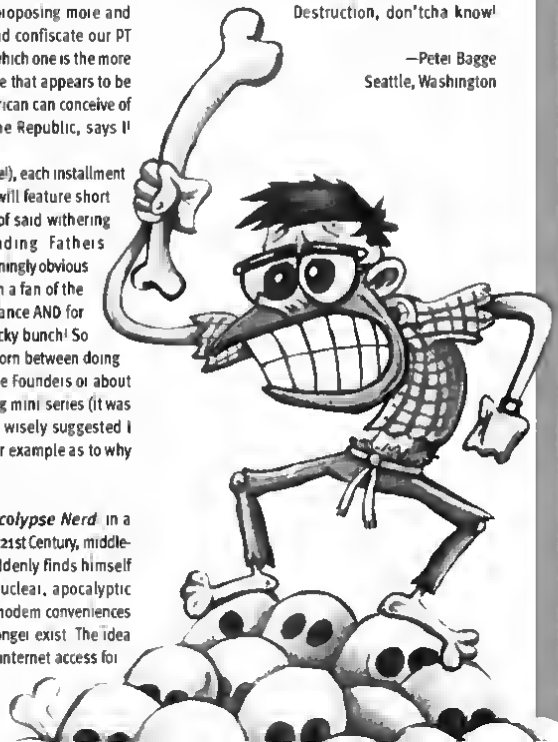
I couldn't watch the presidential debates. Those things always leave me writhing in my chair, despairing for all humanity (I saw my wife watching the first debate, and I jokingly asked "Who's losing?" to which she replied: "We are.") My biggest concern has long been the ever increasing power that the federal government has over our lives, so this election is particularly depressing to me, what with each major candidate proposing more and more reasons to arrest us and confiscate our PT Cruisers. It's a contest to see which one is the more enthusiastic Totalitarian, since that appears to be the only way the average American can conceive of us being "safer." Whither the Republic, says I!

Speaking of which (wotta segue!), each installment of my upcoming mini-series will feature short stories about the CREATORS of said withering republic, entitled "Founding Fathers Funnies"(how's THAT for a groaningly obvious alliteration!). I've always been a fan of the Founders, both for their brilliance AND for their foibles. They were a wacky bunch! So much so that I originally was torn between doing either a series solely about the Founders or about the main story in my upcoming mini series (it was the folks at Dark Horse who wisely suggested I combine the two—just another example as to why they make the big bucks!).

As for the main story in *Apocalypse Nerd* in a nutshell, it's about your typical 21st Century, middle-class American male who suddenly finds himself trying to survive in a post-nuclear, apocalyptic environment, in which all the modern conveniences that we take for granted no longer exist. The idea for this hit me when I had no internet access for a day or two, and I felt like I was going to shrivel up and die because of it. This got me to thinking how severely lacking I am in any sort of survival skills, and forced me to speculate how long I'd last if I was forced to rely on them. Conclusion: not long! I also concluded that an objective observer would probably get a million laughs out of watching me try to survive in such a situation, and thus an idea for a new comical book was born.

Oh yeah, another thing that inspired *Apocolypse Nerd* was hearing a spokesperson for North Korea's government declare that they will soon have the ability to strike Seattle (where I live) with a nuclear bomb. Gulp! This mind-boggling story got next to no play though, since the media was too busy playing cheerleader to Bush's invasion of Iraq at the time. Gotta get those Weapons of Mass Destruction, don'tcha know!

—Peter Bagge
Seattle, Washington



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